Freedom struggle

WOMEN'S BATTLE FOR FREEDOM

- Basavaraj N. Akki

These women Satyagrahis of Karnataka and their role in the history of freedom struggle should be written in letters of Gold. They dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom of their motherland and sacrificed all to achieve their goal

Women participated in a Ryot's Mela

The role of women in the freedom movement is unique in Karnataka. Both in the Pre-Gandhian period and the Gandhian period women participated very actively and sacrificed their lives for the cause of their mother land. In the Pre-Gandhian freedom struggle, women in their role as queens fought for independence of their territories. They were Chand Sultan of Bijapur, Belawadi Mallamma of the Swadi dynasty, Abbakka Queen of Ullal kingdom of South Kanara district, Keladi Rani Channamma, Keladi Rani Veeramma of Keladi dynasty, Onake Obavva of Chitradurga and Rani Channamma of Kittur. It is a matter of great pride to note that the first ever call of revolt against the mighty power of the British was given by a woman, queen of a small State in Karnataka, Kittur, which occupied then a strategic place from both political and military points of view. She is one of the greatest among the freedom fighters of not only Karnataka, but of the whole world. Queen Channamma once defeated a British force and killed Thackrey. Thus Channamma had struck terror in the heart of the British. In the second encounter with the British army she was defeated. Thus, queen Channamma of Kittur opened an era of revolt against the British.

The Gandhian era of freedom struggle in Karnataka began roughly

from the 1920. As in all human historical events, there is bound to be some emphasis upon leadership of prominent personalities who stand out because of their greater initiative or forceful personality or organising abilities. The freedom struggle from 1920 to 1947 was led by Mahatma Gandhi, whose leadership attracted men and women of all walks of life. The Gandhiji's visit to Belgaum in 1924, left everlasting impression upon the freedom fighters, who became the staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi. The leading women participants in Karnataka were Umabai Kundapur, Bellary Siddamma, T. Sunandamma, Kamaladevi Chattopadhya Nagamma Patel, Krishnabai Mirjakar, Subbamma Jois, Yashodharamma Dasappa, Padmavati Bidari, Jayadevi Tai Ligade, Sitabai Ramachandra Madgaonkar and Shakuntala Kurtkoti.

Smt Parvathamma , Halamma and Siddamma

Umabai Kundapur

Umabai Kundapur was a pioneer among the women freedom fighters of the Gandhian era. She came from Bombay and settled at Hubli in 1923. Her father-in-law Sri Anandrao Kundapur was himself a nationalist and encouraged young Umabai to participate in social and public life. Unfortunately, as she became a widow at an early age, she made up her mind to spend her life in the service of the nation. Her stay in Bombay provided an opportunity to listen the speeches of great nationalist leaders of the Congress. In Hubli, she came into contact with Dr. Hardikar who was the main leader at that time. In Hubli, the *Baghini Samaj* and *Tilak Kanyasala* were engaged in creating national awakening among women, and trained women for national movement. After few years Umabai took the responsibility of these centres.

Umbai's service in creating national awareness among women on the eve of Gandhiji's visit to Belgaum in 1924 was highly commendable. She toured all over Karnataka and brought women volunteers to the annual session of the National Congress. For all these activities she was appointed as Chief Leader of the women's wing of the Seva Dal. Umabai once again toured the State to canvas for *Salt Satyagraha* movement. In 1932 for her great courage in mobilising the crowd, she was appointed as dictator for the Non co-operation Movement. On 26th Jan, 1933, she was arrested for participating in the *Satyagraha*. After her release from Jail, she continued to be with Adult Education Drive and other philanthropical programmes.

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Dharwad district. Her father encouraged her national spirit and also her spiritual bent of mind. She was married to Bellary Murigeppa who was also a staunch nationalist and follower of Gandhiji.

The first important event which shook Bellary Siddamma and drove her to public life was the death sentence passed on Mallappa Danashetti and his comrades. All the leaders of the State tried their level best to save the lives of their comrades, but failed in their efforts. At last they were hanged. This message inspired many more youngsters. It was at this time Siddamma declared that British should be driven out of India and independence should be gained at any cost. She was really a very brave woman, she toured all the neighbouring villages of Davanagere, Chitradurga and addressed men and women in their own language and sought their co-operation. Because of her excellent work in organising women volunteers, she was soon recognised as a prominent state-level leader in the Mysore State. Her association with Sardar Veeranagoudar, K.F. Patil, Nagamma Patil, S.Nijalingappa and T.Siddalingaiah enlarged her activities. Her first important public activity was her participation in the memorable Shivapur Congress Session held in April 1938. It was the first Session of the Mysore Congress. In that Session on 10th and 11th the leaders who hoisted the flag were arrested and imprisoned. On 12th April 1938 Bellary Siddamma unfurled the flag and the very next moment she too was arrested. She was the first lady arrested by the British Government in the Mysore State. After her release, she travelled widely all over Karnataka and Mysore, she mainly concentrated her activities in the rural areas. Her second major political activity, was her participation in the programme of cutting the toddy trees in Turuvennur in Chitradurga district under the leadership of S. Nijalingappa. In Quit India movement, she was very active in undertaking underground work. Then in recognisation of her yeomen service to the nation a *Tamrapatra* has been awarded to her.

T. Sunandamma

Nagamma Patil

It was in 1933 when Mahatma Gandhi visited Karnataka for the second time as part of his country wide tour to educate people against untouchability. He was received at Mangalore by the leading Congress leaders among whom were Sardar Veeranagoudar Patil and his wife Nagamma. Their presence was significant because they were already sworn to the cause for which the Mahatma Gandhi was dedicated. They had by that time opened a Harijan Ashrama in Hubli on the lines of the one at Sabaramati. Nagamma then set up *Harijan Balakashram*, the second of its kind in the whole of India.

Smt Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

She travelled in all the neighbouring districts and selected Harijan girls for her *Ashram.* She addressed both men and women in a meeting at Byadagi and called on the people not to extend any co-operation to and the government arrested her on the same day.

Jayadevi Tai Ligade

Jayadevi Tai Ligade was the grand daughter of Sri. Mallappa Warad who was closely associated with Lokamanya Tilak, M.G.Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Jayadevi Tai along with her mother participated in the *Salt Satyagraha movement.* Her area of freedom struggle was confined to the districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur. She organised the national movement against the Nizam of Hyderabad an oppressive ruler and a stooge of the British Raj. In 1946, Jayadevi Tai addressed a huge crowd at Zahirabad near Basavakalyana.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

Kamaladevi was born on April 3, 1903 in an affluent family in Mangalore. Her marriage with Harindranath brother of Sarojini Naidu created a flutter in the orthodox circle and led her to fame and popularity on the national scene through the stage. Her initial involvement in the struggle provided an opportunity to meet the great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Gokhale and Pandit Ramabai. In Pune, she offered her service in organising women volunteers, she also participated in the *Salt Satyagraha.* She was incharge of Seva Dal in 1931. Her main task was to organise and train women for a variety of jobs from first aid to fire fighting to face lathis and bullets. Thus after training herself Kamaladevi returned to Mangalore in 1934. She organised Unions and Adult Education Drive. She aroused political consciousness and organised congress committees. She also participated in Quit India Movement. After independence she devoted her entire life for social work. In recognisation of her noble service she was honoured with Ramon Magasaysay award in 1966.

Krishnabai Panajikar

Krishnabai was the leading woman freedom fighter. She was born on 8th August 1906 at Honnavar. After completing her education she started a primary school and Mahila Samaj at Dharwad. Krishnabai Participated in the *Swadeshi* movement. She soon became well known for her courage and indomitable will and the Dharwad Pradesh Congress Committee requested her to go round to enlist participants for the *Salt Satyagraha.* She moved from village to village inspiring people by speeches. In 1932, she was arrested for anti-government speeches. In 1940, she was the Vice-President of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee. In 1942, she was again sentenced for one year imprisonment, for her anti-British rallies.

Subbamma Jois

Subbamma wife of M.N.Jois who was a dedicated Congress worker. Along with her husband she participated in No-Tax campaign in Karwar district, and *Salt Satyagraha.* She took active part in the flag pamphlets in

which quite a good number of women used to participate under the inspring leadership of Gouramma. Latter women played an important role in No-Tax campaign movement. Later on she looked after an Ashram established by K.A.Venkataramaiah opened for the childrens of *Satyagrahis*, at Shimoga. Subbamma also participated in the Shivapur Congress Session.

Yashodharamma Dasappa

Yashodharamma Dasappa occupies a unique place among the first generation of women freedom fighters of Gandhian era. She was wife of Sri H.C. Dasappa, Yashodharamma's first confrontation with the Government took place at Shivapur Congress Session held on 10th April 1938. It was the first session of the Mysore Congress. She along with other women participants guarded the flag pole, for which she was arrested. She also played an important role in underground activities. Yashodharamma wrote speeches for the *Satyagrahi* leaders. Later she organised a procession and to *Satyagraha* to oppose the decision of the Government to name the building of the town police of Mysore after Hamilton who was known for his cruelty and inhuman treatment of those who participated in national activities.

T. Sunnandamma

T. Sunandamma from Doddaballapur had close association with leaders like T. Siddalingaiah and T.Narasimhayyangar in starting the Niggers youth League in 1936. Once Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel was invited to address the League. T. Sunandamma and her husband were closely associated with its functioning. In the Shivapur Congress Session, T. Sunandamma was a leader of volunteers. There, she led a batch of women clad in white to defend the national flag. She took active part with Yashodharamma Dasappa in the Town Hall *Satyagraha*, at Mysore.

To this list of brave women freedom fighters we have to add the names of Siddamati Mailar wife of brave martyr Mahadev Mailar, of Dharwad District, Ramabai Jeevanarao Yalgi of Belgaum, Sitabai Madagoankar of Siddapur, Bhavanibai Kanagod, T.B. Jayalakshmibai of Chitradurga district, Gangabai N.Mirajkar, Balyatanda Muddamma of Virajpet, Leelavati Magadi daughter of Veeranagouda Patil of Hubli and Shankuntala Kurtakoti of Dharwad District, Mahadevi Narayan Hegde of Siddapur, Rambai Prabhu of Sagar, Laxmi Hari Bai of Bilagi, Bhagirathi Hanumanth Puranik of Siddapur, Shantabai D.Karmarkar Shakuntala Dabade of Dharwad, Sushilabai Kulkarni of Belgaum, Kunthala Seturao, B.Kamakshamma of Bangalore, G.C.Bhagirathamma of Tumkur. All these women freedom fighters in one way or the other participated whole-heartedly and with great courage in the freedom struggle in the State, especially, in organising women volunteers, in distributing pamphlets, and indoing commendable social service for the cause of national movement. They also participated in individual *Satyagraha*, *Salt Satyagraha* and No-Tax campaign.

These women freedom fighters alongwith men fought for socio-economic values and ideal, to popularise democratic ideas. They struggled for the introduction of representative Government and also for the economic development of India, and above all for the freedom of their mother land.

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